

## Flu treatment: Use Mom's remedies before seeing a doctor

*Editor's note: This is the third of a three-part series on seasonal flu. This virus kills 30,000 to 35,000 people living in the United States annually. This article deals with the treatment for it by family members and medical professionals.*

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If you're like most folks, you remember a time or two when you were a child and your mother doctored you back to good health.

Part of her remedies probably included some chicken soup. Other treatments varied depending on what was ailing you.

While Mom wasn't a doctor, she often knew what a doctor would do based on tradition. And in doing so, she provided the real first-line of medical treatment, and sometimes the only one, to get you back on your feet.

With the influenza season nearly upon us, moms today will most likely be back in the doctoring business soon to help youngsters and husbands before a visit to a health care facility maybe warranted.

The chief of Preventive Medicine at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center said he thinks that chicken soup is a good way of treating someone with seasonal flu.

"It's a good mix of all the nutrition that you need – carrots, celery, onions, potatoes – so a lot of vitamins in that, and carbohydrates – the fiber, the protein, the liquids – so chicken soup is a good all-around mix of what you should be eating," Maj. Troy Ross said.

What's good about soup in general, Ross said, is that it's better than soda which has no nutrition, and, sick people, especially kids, don't have an appetite for normal meals.

Bottom line...home care involves making the sick person more comfortable, he said.

"Treat the symptoms. You can't change the course of the illness," he said. "It's going to run its course. We just really don't have cures for viral illnesses."

Influenza is a viral infection.

Getting plenty of rest by not going to school or work, and drinking plenty of fluids are also important home remedies, Ross said.

Rest is important because the body needs its strength to fight the virus.

"Proper rest helps your immune system stay strong and fight the illness off," he said.

While some moderate exercise is fine, Ross said Soldiers really shouldn't conduct Physical Training when they're sick with flu.

"We're not doing anybody any favors with that," he said, referring to a five-mile run. And, since the person is contagious, the virus could spread to others in the unit.

Getting outside for fresh air and allowing for a different mental outlook also is recommended.

Contrary to some beliefs, you can't sweat out a virus, nor drink enough liquids to flush out the virus, Ross said, adding that drinking liquids are important though.

“By staying hydrated – having enough liquid – you’re allowing your body to function properly,” he said. This allows your body to maintain good blood flow, keep the kidneys working well, and help clear the secretions out of your lungs.

Conversely, a person sick with the flu who is dehydrated means the phlegm is thicker and not as able to get out of the respiratory system airways, Ross explained.

And over-the-counter (OTC) medicine is recommended to lessen the symptoms allowing the sick person to feel more comfortable.

OTC should only be taken for the particular ailments, medical professionals stress, to avoid being over medicated.

Another concern with OTC, Ross said, is making sure that children aren’t given any aspirin.

“Aspirin is very important to avoid in children up to adolescent age,” he said. The reason is because in some rare cases, children develop Reyes Syndrome, a neurological disorder that can be life threatening.

Parents should check all OTCs before giving to a child to make sure that salicylate, a white crystalline acid used in making aspirin products, isn’t listed as an ingredient, Ross said.

So, when should someone see a doctor?

There are “different rules for different people,” Ross explained. “Young and (normally) healthy people really don’t need to see a health care provider unless you need to stay out of school or work.”

On the other hand, young children with flu-like symptoms, or people with chronic medical conditions (diabetes, heart disease, etc.) that might become worse from having the flu, Ross said, should see their health care provider relatively soon.

That’s because these types of people may experience more “worse symptoms of the flu because their immune systems aren’t as able to fight it off.”

Initially, people aren’t going to know if they are getting a cold or the flu, he said.

But, if symptoms like having a running nose, sneezing, coughing, headache, fever, and sore muscles persist longer than a week, it’s time to seek professional medical help, Ross said, as a person may have developed pneumonia – an acute or chronic disease marked by inflammation in the lungs.

Laboratory tests can determine if the pneumonia was caused by a bacterial or viral infection. If bacterial, there are antibiotics available to kill it, he said.

“We can do things to help that person recover from the symptoms” even if it’s viral, Ross said, “to help clear out the secretions and handle fluids better.”

While there are some prescription medicines – Relenza and Tamiflu – that can be taken to help lessen complications, they have limited capabilities, Ross said.

For example, they must be taken within the first two days of when a person is feeling ill. And while they can reduce the incidence of developing pneumonia, they usually only shorten the flu’s time by only one day, Ross said.

These medicines are “not a primary tool to control flu and do nothing to stop transmission,” he added.

And, according to health officials, Relenza shouldn’t be prescribed to those with chronic respiratory disease, like asthma, nor those suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

